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East Timor open - a tourist's view

1. Introduction

Tourists are now able to travel freely to most parts of East Timor. They are discovering spectacular scenery. The road from Dili to Baucau winds along the top of steep cliffs that drop straight into a clear blue sea. The mountains at the end of the rainy season are cool lush places with long vistas. Mount Matebean, the "Mountain of the Dead", looks gigantic in the afternoon light. But those who have done a little homework, and can speak Tetum or Portuguese (or Indonesian), find that feelings among the people remain very tense, and they suffer under persistent human rights abuses. It comes as a surprise that Indonesian propaganda about East Timor is so wide of the mark. The worst abuses all arise out of a massive Indonesian military presence: arbitrary shootings of civilians, at the rate of about 10 a month, periodic waves of detentions accompanied by systematic torture, and the rigidly enforced ban on using good agricultural land that happens to be situated some distance from a road.

2. Killings

There is evidence of 27 civilians killed by the Indonesian military in May, June, and July throughout East Timor. These do not include Fretilin guerrillas (known as "forest people"). In the Baucau area alone some horrific stories circulate. On 11 June, two were killed near Fatumaca south of Baucau, coming back from their rice fields, looking for palm wine outside of the curfew time. They were shot on the spot, and their decaying bodies were not found until three days later. Ossu, halfway between Baucau and Viqueque, is in the grip of fear. One person was shot on 30 June on the same pretext as the above. On 17 July three young men were found cutting wood beyond the allowed area. They were accused of being spies come down from the mountains, tied up in one bundle and shot on the spot. Their bodies were not able to be taken until a week later, and had been eaten by the dogs. About 20 July an old man was shot who was grazing his buffalo a short distance outside the allowed area. He was the father of the school head. On 23 June, a 15 year old boy died at Loilubu, southwest of Baucau. Some soldiers entered his house asking for cigarettes. He told them he had nothing and asked them to go to the shop. The soldiers began to shout "Fretilin, Fretilin!", there was a shot and the boy was dead. Strict curfews are not in force everywhere, but only where the army seems to be afraid of guerrillas.

When asked whether the area around Baucau was now safe, to which the expected reply is always affirmative, a casual East Timorese acquaintance replied instead: "It is safe from the forest people, but it's the soldiers who make it unsafe".

3. Detainees

The detention of an East Timorese student in Bali earlier this year, and the unsuccessful request for asylum at the Japanese and Vatican embassies by six students in June, are related to nationalist discussions being held by students at Udayana university in Bali. This is the largest group of East Timor students outside East Timor, but the government is now sending more of them to other universities, where they will be "kept busy" more effectively.

Beginning in May, Kopassus arrested perhaps 100 people all over East Timor suspected of involvement with underground nationalist organisations. Some underground leaders had previously slipped through and escaped to Portugal, using the International Red Cross family reunion plan. The crackdown follows official anger at a letter Bishop Belo sent to the United Nations General Secretary on 6 February urging a UN-supervised referendum on the future of the country. All detainees were routinely tortured in the crudest manner: food deprivation, cigarette burns, electric shocks to the tongue, and beatings.

With the visit of the Pope now definitely planned for 13 October, security authorities in Dili have announced that all political detainees have been released - both those recently arrested as well as those sentenced. There is some independent confirmation that a total of about 75 have recently been released in Dili alone, and that the many detention centres there are now indeed empty of political prisoners. But it is suspected that some remain in detention. All released detainees have been warned not to talk with the priests or with the International Red Cross. All are required to report, in some cases sleeping overnight at the centre, in others spending the weekend there. All of them also have to work for intelligence, updating a black-list that reportedly has 12000 names on it. There is a fear that many will be rearrested after the visit.

4. Indonesian Military

Human rights abuses such as these have been put down to the chaotic nature of the military command structure at the top of the approximately 20 battalions in East Timor. No-one will take responsibility for the actions of other units, and no two commanders have the same idea. Attempts at negotiating a cease-fire between the army and the remaining Fretilin fighters founder every time on this lack of army coordination. Many attempts since the only successful one in 1983 have failed, the last one in August 1988. The military at times takes local initiatives to approach the church: discussions are held, agreements are drawn up and signed. But little happens, and some time later there is a change of army personnel. The new officer does not recognize old-agreements. Every army unit gives orders to the populace: Kopassus, Nainggala, Danrem, Hansip/ Wanra, territorial command, Babinsa, not to mention the police. Apparently the command structure will soon be overhauled. Operational command will go to Denpasar, the Panglima Mulyadi will be moved out, as will President Suharto's son-in-law Prabowo. But no-one knows the timetable.

Prabowo's name is heard on many lips. When he first came he was only a captain, and he is in charge of only one battalion (328 - based around Venilale south of Baucau). But the commander for East Timor treated him as his superior, and he has influence around the country. Venilale feels itself plunged into war again since his coming, "as if the clock has been turned back two years". On a single-handed mission to solve all of East Timor's problems, he appears to have a semi-private troop of Rambo's known variously as the Kujang Raiders, Kateda (KTD - *Kekuatan Tenaga Dalam*), or (unofficially) *tukang kepruk Cendana*, ie. hitmen to protect the president's family business interests in East Timor. He surrounds himself with young East Timorese attracted by his money.

Prabowo is behind a move against governor Carrascalao by a number of

disaffected officials identified with Apodeti, the tiny political party that "invited" Indonesia to take over in 1975. These opportunistic people were given public service jobs immediately after the invasion, but have since been replaced or leap-frogged by better qualified and/or less corrupt people. Carrascalao, who was UDT (a moderate nationalist party of professionals in 1974), is nearing the end of his second and supposedly final term. They accuse him of aiming to become president of an independent East Timor.

Rumours allege that a dozen Apodeti public servants in April presented a petition to the army East Timor commander asking for a hard line against Bishop Belo and against all UDT and Fretilin people involved in underground organizations.

4.3 Casualties and military action

The military graveyard at Dili has a big sign forbidding photographs. The new "heroes park" in Baucau has accumulated well over 200 graves in less than 4 years, an average of more than one a week in the east of the island alone. New ones are continually being added in ones and twos. More would be buried in Dili. Families of Indonesian casualties only get a uniform and backpack sent home to them, without information about how the young man died. Officers bodies are flown directly home. Perhaps 5-10 Indonesian military casualties a month would be a fair guess.

The "heroes graveyard" is used only for battle casualties, not accidental or disease-related deaths. Over three-quarters of casualties are Muslim, thus countering claims that the army is 50% East Timorese. Whilst the Baucau-Viqueque-Lospalos area is perhaps the hottest, shooting is still being heard in other parts too. Six Indonesian soldiers were killed at Bobonaro (between Ainaro and Maliana south of Dili) in July.

5. Civilian government

Outsiders often forget that the civilian government, whilst undoubtedly weaker than the parallel military structure and its business interests, is yearly growing more established. On the executive side, most major positions are held by East Timorese, from the governor all the way down to village heads. Considerable efforts are being made to educate East Timorese for public service jobs. Not half, but a good deal of the army too for that matter is Timorese: certainly Hansip, who are armed and feared in East Timor. The *kabupaten* level representative assembly (DPRD-II) is often a sham by being stacked with men in green, a phenomenon not restricted to East Timor. Some people see Indonesian permanence mostly in terms of the apparent solidity of civil government institutions. Governor Carrascalao is indeed quite popular amongst East Timorese of all stripes for his fierce stand against corruption. Many would like to see him stay for a third term.

6. Church

Bishop Belo's letter to the UN, asking for a referendum on the future of East Timor, made him very popular overnight. Before that he had not been outspoken, preferring quiet diplomacy directly with the military. When a village head was killed near Viqueque the church brought the case to Koren, to the panglima, to the governor, all without success. The bishop

himself approached the military but was merely asked where his proof was. It was then he decided to go public with his letter to the UN. One foreign priest commented that the bishop had failed to see the difference between western and eastern authority. Instead of shaming the Indonesians into action, as he perhaps expected, the letter has simply infuriated them. The Vatican also has not supported the letter. Apparently a Vatican delegate toured East Timor in July. In a meeting with the bishop he expressed his anger and even struck the table.

The pope's controversial visit on 13 October will be a lightning 3 hour affair. He will hold a huge mass at Tacitola beyond the Dili airport, and will meet religious. Priests initially opposed the visit because it implies diplomatic recognition of annexation, but then relented because the people have never had a visit from the pope and will enjoy it. They hope he will at least make a strong statement on human rights.

The church has been in tension with the Indonesian government since the invasion. Outside observers had suggested that the appointment of Mgr. Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo as Apostolic Administrator to replace Mgr. Martinho da Costa Lopes was a concession to Indonesian pressure to tone down on human rights protests. That is why Belo's recent public statements have come as some surprise. In fact the stand Belo has taken is one he has maintained consistently for a long time, and it is no different from that of his predecessor. He may have gained confidence in his own authority after being appointed bishop of Lorium last year.

The Catholic Church in East Timor has a traditional, hierarchical and pre-Vatican II appearance. Parishioners cannot buy a Bible for instance. Every small town has a large and beautifully maintained church as its centre-piece. Priests are addressed with great deference. During the procession around East Timor of a Mary-statue from Rome in 1987, an incident developed in which crowds attacked the house of a man who had insulted the icon. Police and military were unable to calm the crowd, but on the request of a single priest the entire assembly disbanded peacefully. Government officials say the priests are frustrated that they are no longer as influential as in the Portuguese days, when they were "paid by the government and agents of government control". By contrast, the Indonesian government enforces a rigid separation of church and state. There is no doubt that many of the priests long for the old days.

At the same time the church leadership has consciously taken up the defence of the people over against the Indonesians. The people are happy that Belo was not afraid to write to the UN, even though they know the church is unable to do anything for them. Church membership has doubled since the height of the war, it stands today at 540,000 (out of a total population of 650,000), the conversions coming mostly from animist backgrounds in remote areas.

The government has used both the stick and the carrot in an attempt to defeat a church that has become a symbol of nationalist aspirations. The stick has been to limit training possibilities to Indonesia alone. The carrot has been to give generous assistance for church buildings, the most extravagant example being the cathedral in Dili, opened in an unprecedented move by President Suharto. Beginning 5 years ago, the government also began allowing in a sizable number of foreign religious. Most of these are from Portugal, Spain, or Italy. Brazil would be ideal, as it is Portuguese-speaking like East Timor, but it is specifically

excluded, due to a fear of liberation theology. The Fatumaca technical high school is as good as the very best technical training centres in Indonesia. It is run by the Salesian Don Bosco order, and has 10 totally dedicated foreign staff who inculcate values of discipline and hard work.

Church workers sent from Java have a difficult time finding acceptance. One complained: "the people think I have come with the soldiers, but that is not at all the case". Javanese nuns of the Ursuline order have difficulty relating to the East Timorese Canossian order of nuns, and know little about what is going on.

7. Opening of East Timor

East Timor was declared "open" in January 1989. Foreign tourists, and quite a number of refugees who have now become naturalized Australian citizens, now have no difficulty in entering East Timor through Kupang. They are asked to register with the police at the airport, and to acquire a travel permit from the police headquarters in Dili. A permit was required for all areas except the road west to Maubara. Strangely enough there are no roadblock anywhere east of Dili.

But the military presence is overwhelming. The only major hotel in Dili, the Turismo, is full of young men with jeans who carry walkie-talkies hidden in plastic bags. 70% Of traffic on the road between Dili and Baucau, and Baucau and Viqueque, consists of military trucks traveling in convoys of three and loaded with fully armed soldiers. One soldier always "rides gun" overlooking the cab. Lonely military outposts sit on all hilltops commanding a view.

The main reason for opening East Timor was to introduce economic competition and break the monopolistic stranglehold of PT Denok, especially on coffee prices. Coffee is being shipped straight from Dili to Singapore, often on navy ships. The East Timorese seller right now obtains US$ 0.70-1.00 (Rp.1200-1700) per kilogram, depending on whether it is Robusta (cheaper) or Arabica (best quality), and even that price is nominal since the seller is not told the weight of his coffee. Buyers in the field are local Chinese shop-owners acting as agents, but they are guarded by military men (Koramil, Hansip) in uniform. PT Denok is supposed no longer to exist, but we have seen new signs bearing the name in Dili and Viqueque. A letter from the governor dated 16 September 1988 declares that the minimum price should be Rp. 1750-2300 (US$ 1.00-1.35), but it has had no effect. Admittedly international coffee prices have plummeted recently, dropping from US$ 3.00 per kg. 3 months ago to US$ 1.80 in New York today.

Large tracts of coffee plantation are not being harvested because the coffee price is too low. Many analysts feel that, provided it has the political will, the Jakarta government can easily dismantle Denok's monopoly administratively.

Meanwhile, as many as 25000 heads of families have arrived since January 1989, flooding the place with Buginese and Makassarese. Economists say the East Timorese have a "negligible" share in the local economy. Casual observation confirms this: there are no East Timorese-owned restaurants or shops. One foreign church worker, who has little sympathy for Fretilin, remarked: "the real war is now".

8. General situation

8.1 Fretilin

Fretilin clearly has the sympathy of the majority of the people. They now have about 200 guns, and about 800-1000 people living "in the forest". The latter figure includes women, old people and children. There may be 12-13 cells active in Dili. However, militarily, Fretilin is fighting a losing battle. Their children are known to be in poor condition. Their methods in the city appear amateurish. For purely humanitarian reasons, some priests have urged them to give up fighting with their guns, because it will only lead to their death in the forest, and to start fighting with their brains instead. They urge them to think of their children and their old men.

Official assertions that they are now no longer even "rebel bands", but merely a handful of thieves, are obviously exaggerated. The large number of soldiers in East Timor are not all there to help build roads and houses for the people, as the official line goes. Travelers chuckle about "another truckload of road-builders with their shovels ready-cocked". But considering Fretilin's limited military capabilities, such a large army presence must be there more to terrorize the general population than merely to counter Fretilin.

Last year there was quite a flurry about an "alternative" nationalist movement known as Santo Antonio. This now appears to have been a fleeting phenomenon, flavoured by white magic and sub-christian messianism. It was one of several such movements since the war. Some even suspect it was an Indonesian army set-up. It was led by poorly educated people who envisaged a takeover of East Timor by placing their own people in lower administrative positions such as the *camat* and *bupati*. About 90 persons were arrested in December. Most were were released again in January, though a few were given sentences of some months. The movement is regarded as dead now.

8.3 Resettlement villages

One of the biggest human rights abuses continues to be the forced resettlement of the entire population along the main roads. Someone who has been to Java finds little that is striking about villages consisting of rows of identical houses, often with tin roofs. But the fact is that the East Timorese traditionally lived scattered, each family on its own parcel of land. And the most fertile land is in the mountains where roads are few. These roadside villages are all new. Soldiers who pride themselves that they are "helping the people build houses" do not realize they are implementing an oppressive programme of land deprivation.

Government technocrats, supporting the army's concept of resettlement villages, say that traditional settlement patterns are incompatible with the provision of modern services such as education, medical care and transportation, which all require a degree of centralization. These arguments draw on a geographical monograph by Joachim K Metzner, *Man and environment in Eastern Timor* (ANU Canberra 1977). This book also states that traditional scattered settlement patterns are not ecologically

viable, and are in any case not traditional since they only developed after the Portuguese had pacified the country from tribal war. It is unfortunate that in this case the technocratic arguments, which carry some weight, coincide with the security needs of the Indonesian army to deprive Fretilin of support.

Whilst no population distribution data is available comparable to that in Metzner's pre-war study, government officials admit that large areas of former plantations remain closed to the people, "because Fretilin is still there". The ban on use of this land is enforced on pain of instant death, as the incidents quoted above demonstrate. Enormous wealth in the form of thousands of head of cattle were lost due to the Indonesian invasion, adding to the pain of deprivation. People say: "If we were allowed to go back to our fields, the towns would be empty". One woman in a particularly ghastly new village, when asked on her own why she did not go back, said: "We're not allowed to". But after a little crowd had gathered, she changed her line and said: "We're all Indonesians now, we don't understand what you are talking about". The Catholic church has attempted to obtain the agreement of the military for people to use again the SeiÇal River valley between Venilale and Mount Matebean, so far without success. Venilale itself is chronically short of water, whilst plentiful water is available in the valley below. In 1986, many people were killed who tried to go into that area to farm.

Every Saturday, all villages at least in the Baucau-Viqueque area have to report for a full roll-call and lecture, guarded by armed soldiers. On 17 July, "Integration Day", soldiers made the people of Ossu engage in a weird ritual in which the Indonesian flag was dipped in palm wine, after which people had to sip from the palm-wine. The story spread that it was dog's blood the people had to drink.

8.4 Birth control and alleged medical atrocities

Earlier this year East Timorese solidarity groups alleged a number of gross medical mal-practices, but it now appears these were ill-founded. Among them were the use of involuntary injections of the long-lasting contraceptive drug Deprovera, the dropping of poisoned cakes on a beach, and the poisoning of 200 children in a Dili hospital by cough medicine laced with DDT.

The girls who feared they had been injected with contraceptive were in fact given tetanus toxoid in the arm, which can give protection to unborn children. Deprovera would have had to be injected in the thigh. Medics in Indonesia usually do not inform their patients what they are doing. Because of church opposition, birth-control is not flourishing in East Timor. Nevertheless pressure to adopt it is great, with reports of family planning teams entering villages on days when the priests are not there, and ordering a village roll-call to make sure of full attendance.

The cakes dropped on a beach were probably intended for troops, and were not poisoned. Cough medicine used in the Dili hospital has been tested and not found to contain any poison. The report of poisoning may have been related to the death due to diarrhea of a much smaller number of children in a suburb of Dili, not at the hospital. With East Timor now relatively open, it should be possible to avoid having to rely on unverified stories.

8.5 Popular feelings

Despite the constant barrage of propaganda over the television and radio, and the fear of detention over a casual conversation, everybody seems to know the names of Fretilin leaders. No-one except officials used the term "integration" to mark the events of 1976, instead they talk about "the war". There are many bitter memories of atrocities, particularly the Operasi Kikis in 1983. Village graveyards are eerily full of graves dated between 1977-1979. Nevertheless, Fretilin is clearly unable to engage widely in propaganda activities.

The atmosphere is extremely tense. It is not possible for a foreigner to hold a conversation about life in East Timor in which the other does not sooner or later come out with a strong political statement: either pro- or anti-Indonesian. This requires no provocation except an unwillingness at times to accept what is obviously a party line. A truck driver who had Indonesian soldiers on board proclaimed loudly how he had been mistreated by Fretilin, and how different this behaviour was from that of the "gentlemen" from Indonesia. But when pressed to tell more, he suddenly looked depressed and said: "I only want to make a living, I am afraid, that is why I told you that fib just now. I once took some foreigners around, and afterwards I was interrogated for several days without food". The rest of the trip passed in painful silence.

East Timorese, like people throughout the archipelago, are traditionally warm and hospitable. But now they dare not entertain foreign visitors, in case they are interrogated about it afterwards. Their pain is that what is a duty to them is made impossible by fear. One priest commented over and over: "The atmosphere here is oppressive. You just live here for 2 or 3 months and you will feel how it is". A visiting Javanese academic, after an absence of 8 years, spoke about "the psychology of fear", and expressed disappointment that "so little has changed since 1981".

Even pro-Indonesian people are unwilling to accede to Indonesian propaganda about the Portuguese time. One person got angry about TV claims that there were no primary schools outside the capital before 1976, and that the Portuguese discriminated against poorly dressed people in parks and on aeroplanes. He recognized that the Indonesians are widely regarded as hated enemies, but only felt that there is no alternative to Indonesian rule. He did not believe the story that Apodeti was the major party when it "invited" Indonesia to take over, and recognized that most Timorese continue to want independence. The dominant reason given for the stand taken by pro-Indonesian East Timorese officials is that "it is better not to live in a dream, we have suffered enough. A referendum on East Timorese independence, as asked for by the bishop, would be war all over again". This is a valid reason, though hardly an enthusiastic endorsement of Indonesia.

Indonesian economic development is quite visible: especially infrastructure such as roads, schools and television repeaters. But most of these facilities are there not altruistically but for purposes of control. One priest commented: "We remain human beings, even if we are given a golden bed to sleep in". He went on to quote the story of an 80-year old man who wanted to leave, because "it is better to die in freedom".

Javanese often make typical colonial comments about the low intellectual capacities and the laziness of the East Timorese. A recent series of

newspaper articles (Kompas 10-13/7/1989) apparently quoted without comment the view that low coffee prices were a good thing, because East Timorese only waste their money on parties (fiesta). A priest replied: "We suffer when we are invited to a fiesta: outwardly we celebrate, but inside it is different. The situation today is just the same as it was in 1976".

9. Conclusions

Tourists are bringing back a generally depressing picture of developments in East Timor, tinged with some bright spots. East Timor at the end of the rainy season is a country of exceptional beauty. A hopeful aspect of the new open-door policy is that Indonesian propaganda about the situation becomes more transparent to inquiring eyes and ears. And the controversial visit of the Pope's visit planned for October has had one positive spin-off in that many, though not all, political detainees, appear to have been released in Dili, and probably in Baucau as well.

But the people live in fear under a massive Indonesian military presence. Those released now could well be rearrested after the Pope's visit. Arbitrary killings by security forces are continuing in many areas. The resettlement policy is still enforced on pain of death, leaving large tracts of land still depopulated. Cemeteries all over the countryside are full of graves from the height of the war between 1977-1979, and feelings of bitter hatred have not been appeased. Intermittent fighting is continuing, and both Fretilin and the Indonesian army are taking casualties, the latter on a scale of perhaps 5-10 deaths every month. The population still hopes fervently for independence, but in such a climate of arbitrary terror their ability to withstand pain indefinitely must be questioned. The Catholic church is taking a popular stand with the people, even at the risk of Vatican displeasure, and certainly at the cost of good relations with Jakarta.

East Timor's economy is dominated completely by non-indigenous groups. The civilian Indonesian government is acquiring more permanence every year, and it is difficult to see that Indonesia will easily withdraw. If so, East Timor must remain an increasingly visible indictment of Indonesian humanitarianism.